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This document is the transcript of an interview with Susan Williams, director of Gordonbrock Infant School in Brockley, London, England. Her school is the subject of a film by Lillian Weber. The interview was conducted by Courtney Cazden of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The substance of some of her remarks follow: (1) The major differences between the traditional grade school classroom and the new form used at Gordonbrock are (a) the former was teacher-directed; the latter is child-directed; and (b) the new form involves more concern for teaching something to the child when the child is ready, and this necessitates a good deal of individual or small-group instruction. (2) The teachers' daily lessons, although preplanned, are not rigid, but fluid, depending upon how the teacher-pupil interaction develops during the class period. (3) Much of the instruction is done, not with the whole class of pupils, but with smaller groups who have demonstrated the need for a particular type of instruction. (4) The classrooms are composed of about 40 children from ages five to seven. (5) The teachers keep informal records on each child's progress and abilities so as to be aware at all times of what type of instruction is relevant or necessary for him. (WD)

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A London Infant School

Following is an interview with Miss Susan M. Williams, director of Gordonbrock Infant School in Brockley, London S.E. 4, England, at her home in Brockley, 9/3/67, the day before the beginning of the new school year. Her school is shown in the film made by Mrs. Lillian Weber (5415 Netherland Avenue, New York 71, New York). The questions I asked Miss Williams are some of those often asked by American educators and student teachers after seeing that film or after reading the Plowden Report or other descriptions of infant schools in England.

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I don't know if you realize that Lillian Weber's movie has been shown around quite a bit, even already, and has stimulated a great deal of interest in the kind of education that you're doing at Gordonbrock.

Well, that's splendid, because I know that when she was over here, she said to me, "I know I've got a very uphill struggle when I get back. It's all very well to say this goes on. And it's obvious that it is going on in so many of the schools over here. But I don't want to go back with a movie of a school, a modern school--wonderful modern buildings, and plenty of light, plenty of space. I want a school that's really old with a great deal of--corners, shall we say, where it's rather difficult to put things out. And small classrooms and many children." Gordonbrock seemed to her to be just the one that was going to show America that it can be done. It doesn't matter where. We've done it where we've had stepping in the classroom. And desks, the old-fashioned desks-

Where you've had what?

Stepping. When I was a child, and until quite recently--in fact, when I went to Gordonbrock in '53 there were still some rooms with stepping. The classrooms have a flat place in front where the teacher walks around in her little special apartment, shall we say. This is how it used to be. Then, toward the children--where the children sat--there would be a series of steps. The steps went right across the classroom, and they would go up about six inches at a time.

It would be like a small auditorium, then.

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That's it, exactly. And the desks were screwed down, onto each of these steps. The teacher stood in front, and she could see the children, because they were all at different levels; she could see the children at the back as easily as those in the front. That was called "stepping." And as you went up and down the rows to see to the children many a time I've stumbled down a step--you're in for a nasty turn on those. Finally we had them all taken away. But I've even done this work in a classroom with stepping, and with sloping desks. So, there's nothing that people can say we can't manage. It can be done. It can be done under all sorts of difficulties.

During the war, when we really did have difficulties, I was at a school where children came and went because they would be evacuated and then mother would go and bring them back because it seemed quiet here. The children would come to school for awhile. And then we'd have another severe bombing and away they'd go again. There was a constant coming and going. In the classroom I had, at a school which was bombed, we had tables--adult tables, teachers' tables, and teachers' chairs, the old-fashioned sloping desks--tables and chairs from here, there and everywhere. I can't describe the furniture. And yet, we managed to do just this. With very little material. We were painting on newspapers--using anything. But it can still be done.

What are some of the major differences between the traditional classroom and and what happens at Gordonbrock--not in terms of physical arrangement but in terms of the kinds of things the teachers and the children do?

The difference, of course--the great difference--is that the teacher doesn't go along saying to herself, "This is what I'm going to teach the children today." She goes to school prepared for anything. Because it's going to come from the children. She doesn't say to herself, "I'll go today and I will teach the children addition." --shall we say, just for example. She goes to school, and addition might come out of something which the children are doing. A child might be building with bricks, and he'll say to another child, "I want 12 more bricks to finish this." We seize on any opportunity. And then, once that is begun, we continue with it. You might have the children counting in 2's. Or you might say "There were 2 girls here, and 2 girls over there." But let the children discover it for themselves. "How many girls are here? 2." "How many little girls over there?" Adding the 2's. Not going along and writing on the blackboard "2 + 2 = _." And then say to the children, "Copy that down. Now take out your counters." Do you see? It's not teacher-directed. It is child-directed. It's what happens--it's happening constantly. You can't shut your eyes to it.

A child comes along and says, "Your coat is the same color as mine." Well, then, what a lovely talk you can have about colors. You can--if the child is ready for it--make up a book about colors. You can cut out pictures of ladies dressed in yellow dresses, and that can be the yellow page. And the child will really get it established. And the green page, and the red page, and so on. And you can have "My book of colors," so that when they want to do their creative writing instead of coming to you and saying, "How do I spell 'yellow'?" they go to the color book, and the child discovers how to spell 'yellow.' It's part and parcel of living--learning. The child educates himself, really, through his own needs, through what he discovers.

He suddenly discovers, by looking at a book that the first letter of his name is exactly the same as the first letter of somebody else's name. He says, "Oh look! You've got that and so have I!" And then, if you are there, you say "Ah, yes, that says /b/ for Bobby. And that says /b/ for Betsy. What else can we think of that starts with /b/?" You see how different it is? It's coming from the child. Not teacher'directed. I would say child-discovery, and then guided by the teacher. It's a talking together just as you and I are talking. Here we have already learned from one another. You've told me all about what you were doing in Scotland and what you'd found out about the Edinburgh Festival. You see, you have enriched my--not exactly experience--but you have enriched my knowledge? I've been educated. And it goes on constantly.

A mother, when she is training her child, doesn't sit down and give the child a talk on how to use the spoon and pusher. She shows the child, and knows that when the child is ready the child begins to take. The mother doesn't sit down and say, "Now tomorrow we are going to use the spoon and pusher," does she? I know that's taking it to a great length. It really has not much to do with what we were talking about with the school. But it is the same sort of idea. It's got to come naturally. But the teacher has got to be at the ready. That, I think, is the main difference. She's got to be aware--all the time. She can't stand back, and say, "Well, I've written it all up on the blackboard. Now I've talked to them about it. They must all have taken it in because I've told them about it." You know the little sponges are not taking it in. Otherwise they wouldn't be flicking things around the room, or pulling somebody's hair. If they were really interested, they would be with her all the time.

Another difference I would say with this method is that you can see when the child is ready. The method as we used to have it--you took it whether the child was ready or not. But now the children are doing different things in the classroom. They select what they want to do. And they are learning from the material they have selected. From each child the teacher--the teacher who is aware--can discover something from the child, and she can enrich that child's knowledge. But she's not to be aware. I think that is one of the big differences. You can go to school, as I did when I was a young teacher, with a lesson beautifully thought out. Tell the children a wonderful story; try to get them interested; have something for them to do at the end of the story; and think, "Oh, I've done a wonderful thing because they've all copied it out. The writing from some of them was absolutely beautiful." But ask those children to read about it two or three days later and I doubt whether more than one in ten would really be able to read all of it. Except fluent readers.

You said the teacher doesn't go to school with a lesson plan of what she's going to teach that day. But what kind of planning does the teacher do?

Now don't misunderstand me. I didn't say that she doesn't have a plan. She must have some idea of what she's going to do. Starting from scratch, when we go back tomorrow, the teacher doesn't really know what's going to evolve because she's starting off with children who before were--oh dear, you do realize that mine is a family group school, don't you?

Yes.

So when the teachers go back tomorrow, the children who are the oldest in the class are going to be what used to be the middle group--the middle group in age. Don't misunderstand me because we don't group them. They are fluid. But, shall we say the middle group in age are going to be the oldest children in the class, those with more experience.

They'll be seven?

They will all be seven by the end of next August. The oldest child by about the end of next week.

But there's not a child in the school who's seven years old at the moment. Then during the week, the new children will arrive. So that the oldest ones are 6 plus, then the 5-plusses, and then these others who are coming into school. Some of them are already five-plus, and some of them are rising fives.

The teacher doesn't really know what's going to evolve but she has got in mind what she will do tomorrow. She'll set about arranging her classroom, of course. And she will introduce the children, perhaps in a new room altogether, because we change around. And she'll just refresh their memories: this is where we keep different things. And then of course a whole lot of talking about the holidays, and what they did. No doubt a holiday book will be begun. The children will each write or paint or do something about what they did in the holiday. They might create something with the sand. We do know that will happen during the day. I expect my teachers have already got their stories prepared--perhaps a story about the seaside, or a story about the country. You see, that will definitely be there.

Stories that they will read?

Read or tell. They must have that in mind. Now as the term goes on, and the different ideas evolve, then the teacher can get her work prepared. You can't just leave it to chance.

When people see Lillian's movie, what you don't see is the planning that happens behind the scenes so that this wonderful life in the classroom goes on and gets somewhere.

People seeing it think that this is just incidental and accidental learning. You can't see how the teacher plans to bring about a real progression in the child's knowledge and understanding and skills.

No, I don't think that does come out in the film. How can I put it? Well, supposing it's getting near November the fifth. Of course, the children will be thrilled about that.

Excuse me, what's November fifth?

November fifth is Guy Fawkes Day, which we celebrate still with fireworks and so on, as you might have on All-Hallows--Now that is coming along, and the

children get awfully keen on this. So, we take the child's interests. You can make your different fireworks, and that involves measuring. So you use your inches. You've got to have sticks of a certain length for your rockets. So that requires measuring. If you make banners, you'll need some measuring on that won't you? You'll hear the story of Guy Fawkes. If you're going to have

a Guy Fawkes party, that involves making the cakes. So along comes your weighing, directions for cake-making, making the cakes, time the cakes take to cool, the costs of the cake. A certain amount of science will come into it. Why is the top of the oven hotter than the bottom? What happens? I'm saying this very quickly and this is quite general.

But then, you see, the children are at different stages--some children will write how they make the cakes; some might be just content to paint a picture--"I made some cakes"--this is according to their own particular level. This has nothing at all to do with the age of the children in the classroom, because we find that fives work quite happily with sixes, and sevens can work quite happily with fives. It all depends on their experience and their readiness. But the children who are most able will write quite lovely little--creative works of art, shall we say--paint pictures of what they've been doing, and then write lovely descriptions of how they made the cakes, and whether any of the cakes got burnt, and what time they put them into the oven, what time they took them out, how long the cake took to rise.

A lot of the knowledge the teacher has given--you could say "incidentally" but not really incidentally because no teacher does it incidentally. She's got something and she wants to put it over to the children, doesn't she. She's not just throwing out little pearls here and there. She really has got that in her mind that these children want to make cakes right. "Now what can I get from teaching these children to make cakes?" The feel of different things--the fatty feel of the butter, the soft feel of the flour. Even from that you can go on and find out how do we get flour--you can do quite a lot, according to the age of the children, their knowledge, and their desire to know.

Let's say she finds out, because of the work of making the cakes, that a child is having trouble in dealing with fractions that are involved in cooking. How could she plan to work on that in the subsequent days?

Ah! Now that will be going on in quite a number of other ways, because with their water play they have the opportunity to find out how many of these make a whole one. That all comes in their incidental work as well. The whole of it is there in the classroom. You can find out that 2 half-pints make a pint. We have fraction games that they play where you can find out that 2 semicircles put together match up with a complete circle. You do quite a lot of talking too, you see, about halves--when they cut the cakes. How many children? How many made the cakes? From that you can go from your halves to your quarters, your fifths, your sixths, your eighths.

Would she ever take the initiative in gathering together one, or two or more--

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Yes! Oh, definitely!

And actually do what you might call a formal lesson--

Oh, definitely! Oh, yes! You see, you started by asking me how does it differ. The difference is in the approach. But, teaching remains teaching throughout. If you find that children are having difficulty with one particular aspect, and you want to make quite sure to establish that, then you gather these children together, and you work away at that until you are sure that they understand. Then you send them back again to their play with this knowledge. Let's take the cake-making again. They've been making the cakes; they've been weighing them. And then the puzzlement about how many ounces make a pound, shall we say. 4 ounces make the quarter and 8 ounces make the half--and some couldn't quite grasp that. The teacher gathers the group together, and they have a long --no, not a long, about twenty minutes--but, at any rate they do have her entirely to themselves while they all work out, with the scales, that the 4 ounces match with the quarter of a pound weight. They weigh different things. They really get that established. And then she sends them back again to make their cakes, with that knowledge.

How large might that group be?

It could be anything from four to ten, according.

Does that happen very often?

It happens all the time. The teacher has little groups. This is a way that I can tell you: Sometimes I have children myself. I go to a teacher and say, "Have you got any children I can have for a little while who need some special help with numbers?" She says, "Oh, yes." And she takes out a little group--we have a good look first to see that we're not dragging them away from some other special interest. But generally I can gather a little group. If I can't get enough from her, I say to another teacher, "Have you got any?" Then I take the children out--they can come out into the hall with me--and we talk. We count the children who are there, we count somebody's buttons--this is purely counting. We walk up and down my stairs--I've got all the stairs numbered, and they go up and down the stairs. Then we have a lovely time picking out the number symbols. You wouldn't say that at the end of that time every child in that group would know all those number symbols. But I do think that every child in that group would know at least one number symbol. Then I can have them again next day, and on we go from there. You can do it so many different ways. You don't need a great deal of the apparatus that's on the market. You can manage quite easily with everything that's round you. You want 4--well, you can have 4 boys; you can put 2 children together and they've got 4 legs on a chair. All of that helps to establish in the child's mind the 4--and then matching the symbol. "You draw 4 lines for me. You draw 4 people. Go and find 4 of anything for me and bring it to me." Oh, yes, we definitely take the groups. And we take the whole class, too. We don't talk just to the individual children all the time. We take a whole class. Why not? Why not have the whole class and talk about time?

The whole class is a mixed-age group?

A mixed-age group. But you can do it.

That would be how many children?

Forty. Forty children. We find that with the stories, children all enjoy the stories. You'll have your children who roll around on the floor--we get it quite a lot sometimes from some of our little immigrant children who aren't used to sitting and listening to stories. It seems to us--I may be quite wrong--but quite a number of them we find, do tend to roll around. We let them roll. They don't upset the other children. But if we find that a child really cannot concentrate, then we let him go and play quietly in the house corner. But you'll find very soon those children will creep back to the group and sit down and enjoy the story. We take stories that will be suitable for the very young--you know, the little nursery stories. And we take stories that are suitable for the older children because, naturally, they've got to reach on--they want a little bit more. We find that the younger children will listen to these stories just as well. A story is a story, isn't it. I remember one of my staff told me that when she was a little girl at home ill with measles--this was an experience I never had because radio wasn't even invented when I was a child. She was at home ill and her mother put on a program--I suppose it was something similar to Woman's Hour--where a serial was being read. She said she thoroughly enjoyed it. She hadn't got a clue what it was about, but she thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a story, and children will listen to stories.

When you go around and ask a teacher "Do you have some children who need help with numbers?" for the teacher to answer you, she has to know her children--what they know and what they don't know, and exactly where they are. Does she keep this in her head? Or do you keep records?

She jots. She jots during the day, and she writes it up at the end of the week. She keeps a very comprehensive record about her children, about their characteristics, when they show that they're beginning to take leadership, when they are apprehensive--and with this, you really know your children. Not only are you aware of their needs, intellectually and physically, but you do have the opportunity to stand back from the children and observe. It's only in observing children that you really do know your children. If you're sitting there, and you've got all the little ones all doing the same thing at the same time, what opportunity have you really to know your children? But if they can select what they want to do, and you can find out the thoughts that are going on in the child's mind, you really do begin to know your children. Couple that with the fact that you can see the parents--talk to them, find out a little what's it like at home, whether they're sharing a house or whether they're living in two rooms, whether there's a baby arrived, whether the child is the middle child. Couple all that with your own observations in the classroom, and the fact that with this family grouping, you do keep your children the whole time. At the end of the two years, or three years in the case of some children, you really

do know them. That has a great deal to do with the way that you are going to teach your children. You know the child who is going to be quick to grasp something. And you know the child who's got to be led along very, very slowly and very gently.

Is writing down part of her job? It's something she really must do?

Oh, yes.

Are these notes kept by the individual child, or is it a log of the whole group activity?

No, there's a page for each child. It's individual. But side by side with that she has a quick jotter where she might write down--under headings, shall we say "fluent speaking," "answers in monosyllables"--these are just certain headings that you could have. "Reading readiness," "on an introductory book," and so on. Then she would but the tick underneath that, but that is very quick--or she might put the date. Just so she can look at it quickly and see what is happening. Again, with numbers, she might write down, "Can recognize number symbols to 5"--or "to 10," "Can count to--" whatever it might be. She must keep a record, otherwise she's going to get hopelessly bogged, isn't she. We teach the sounds, too, the phonetics. Well, then you must tick off for those. You must know whether your child knows the sounds or not.

You mentioned that the teacher must be aware of individual children. If she has 40 children in her class, it seems such a difficult job for her to be aware, for her to spend time with individual children, capitalizing on and using their experiences as they work at the workbench, or whatever, and also do the kind of small group teaching that you've described. How does she get around?

She generally begins her day with a chat with the children. They have different ways of starting. I ve got experienced teachers who just take it in their stride. But I ll try to describe it from the point of view of somebody who's coming fresh to it. I've had quite a number of youngsters straight from college. My advice to them, first of all, is: Talk to the children. Find out what they have elected to do straight away and then insist--you've got to have order, you can't have chaos in your classroom--and so, by the time that 4 children have said, "I want to play in the sand,""Right, 4 children. Not more than 4 children." You see, make your rules as well. Two children may go and play with the water. "Two people have said they want water; that's the end." "So many children may go and play in the house corner."

You have all these different activities, I'll call them for want of any other word. They're all around the classroom. A child hasn't got to rack his brains and think, "Now, what do I want to do." It's all there for him to see. Very often the teacher will put exciting material down which will suggest something to the child. She might put some cardboard boxes and think, "That will give the children an idea. They might start making a train." Then she must be prepared to find that it's been turned into a robot. She'll put material which will set the children thinking. Now, don't think that the children all work individually, because they don't. We're most of us gregarious, aren't we? The children will get into little groups. There's always a leader of a group, and the children work together. So your group is naturally formed for you.

Don't think of the harrassed teacher dashing from one child to hear her read, to another child to explain some mathematical problem, because that isn't so. That is the impression in the film, but nobody could live. We'd all be dead. We'd be dead in a week. You couldn't do it. The impression is conveyed in the film because it had to be done quickly. The camera swung from one thing to another. We all know that the camera can give quite a wrong impression. A camera can make a dog look as though it's answering somebody, can't it. That was a very busy time. The children were getting their materials and they were starting. Then a long time goes while the children are working with those materials and the teacher perhaps is hearing a little group read. Or she's got another little group who've arranged themselves, and they're doing some creative writing, and she goes to them. I know, the film gave me that impression. When I saw it, I thought we couldn't possibly work at that speed. You know that it couldn't be so, and your common sense would tell you this is just a case of little points being picked up by the camera, showing the children, what they can do, and then leaving you to think out "What did they get from it."

Let's say the children are working at different things, and the teacher sits down with a few children who are doing creative writing. Will children from other activities come over to interrupt her for help?

Yes, yes, they do.

Then what does she do?

Very often it's merely a question of saying, "Well, now, go back and try it that way." And the other children will take that for granted. Imagine yourself with your family. You're busy showing your eldest daughter how to cut out a dress. Both of you are really getting involved with it, and you're both thoroughly enjoying it. This is what is happening with the children who are doing their creative writing. They're thoroughly enjoying it because there is their teacher with them. She's there tohelp them if they say to her, "I don't know how to write this." She is there to say, "Go and get the dictionary, and we'll find this word. Look for it on the page where the words start with /p/" or start with /pee/, according to the progress of the child. Some of them would do it with sounds, and some would do it with the names of the alphabet. Then while

you're busy helping your daughter with her dress, your husband comes in. And he says, "Have you any idea where I put that letter from old So-and-so?" You say, "Just a moment," and you turn to your daughter and you say, "You just pin that up for a moment while I help Daddy." You say to him, "I think we tucked it away with these different papers," and he goes ahead and hunts through it to find what he wants. There is your child coming from another group to interrupt. You then return to the dressmaking, and your other daughter comes in. She wants to know something, and so again you spare just a few moments to talk to her and put her right so that she can go on with what she's doing on her own. You have to use your common sense quite a lot over this. After all, if you are taking a whole class of children, nobody would expect the teacher to talk to each one individually although you do know that each one of those children has got a problem.

Supposing you tell me how they take a class in America, and then we'll see what the difference is. How do you do it when you're taking a class? Then I can see what the problems are.

I think the major difference--at least, judging from what you're saying and the film--is the intensity of the experience to the teacher. If you're taking a class--after you have a discussion to do some arithmetic examples, or do some writing, or read--the teacher can relax a bit.

Yes, but what are they writing about? What are they reading about? And what are they doing their arithmetic examples about? What does it come from? That is the basic difference, isn't it. You take them out of the air and you say, "We're going to learn this. I'll give you some examples. Now, dear little children, sit down and just work out the examples. And if you can work out the examples, I will assume that you understand it." But you see, we don't assume that. We want to know that the child really does understand it. You can give as many examples as you like, but it doesn't necessarily follow that when a child has worked out quite a number of examples of 6 + 2 makes 8, 5 + 2 makes 7, 9 + 2 make 11, that the child really does know what "plus 2" means. But if you get right down to the basic with a child who is just discovering it--that he's got 2 hands and his friend has got 2 hands, so they've got 4 hands, and somebody else has got 2 hands so they've got 6 hands between them--that is a discovery. The sum is not the experience. The sum is merely a fact, isn't it. Once you know that 2 and 2 are 4, it's a fact and there's not much point in writing it down. The child enjoys that. But the discovery was made by the child.

When the children choose--4 to work in the sandbox, 2 to work in the water--does the teacher ever try to influence those choices, or say, "The first thing this morning I'd like to work with so-and-so."

Yes, that must come sometimes, because we have such large classes. If we hadn't got the large classes it wouldn't be necessary because the child would have more time with the teacher. We are defeated, as you are, with large classes. Sometimes she might say, "I'd like you and you to come with me first thing this morning. I want to go on with something we were doing yesterday. So I'd like you please to stay with me." By the time the children really know their teacher, they know that no more than so many can be working at different things. Of course, as the term goes on, the children have got embroiled, so they know what they want to do and they automatically go on with that.

When the child has finished with the sand play and comes to the teacher and says, "Would you like to come and see what we've made," then she'll go to the sand play and the child will say, "You see we've made a castle here, and that's the road, and that is something else." Then the teacher can step in and say, "What sort of castle is it? What do you call this little tower on the corner? Do you know anything about castles as they used to be?" And as she begins to talk about what the children have done with the sand play, the other children will begin to come around. And before she knows where she is, she's sent one child off to the library to get a book about castles, and then they all talk about castles. There is your opening for history stories, and all your creative writing is going to be about castles. The children are going to make their own suits of armor. They're going to make their own lances, and so on. What great vistas are opened up, just from some sand play.

With the children who are less experienced, the teacher can say, "That is a very little sandpie, and that is a big sandpie. Which one is the largest?" And the child is learning comparison there. That one's larger than that one; that one's smaller than that one. "How many sandpies have you made?" "I've put 4 sandpies there, and John has put 2 sandpies over there." "How many sandpies altogether?" "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6." Again, the teacher is quick, and she steps in. "Oh, yes, 4 shells here and 2 shells there. How many?" "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6." And so she goes on until the child realizes: 4 and 2. But it won't be, of course, with that lesson. She has to remember that. She makes a little jotting of it, or she has a mental note. But she must remember it. And the next day she gathers those same children together and she goes on with it, just as you do with your ordinary formal lesson, don't you. I mean, if you've taken a formal lesson--shall we say, on plus 2--you know very well that all your 40 children haven't taken that in on one day. Some children have. And so you also note down, don't you, and you say to yourself, "Tomorrow I must take that other little group and I must do that again with them." The teacher's not doing any more than that. The only thing is that while she is working with those children, the other children are gainfully employed; they are laerning from their own experiences all the time.

Castles might come up and they might not. But are there some things that the teachers make sure that the children do and learn? Such as--well, numbers we've spoken of quite a bit. Does she care if castles get talked about?

Oh, no, because it could be something quite else. It could be monsters. It could be prehistoric monsters, and there you are way back again. You're talking about man, and then you make your things out of clay. You're creating as primitive man did, and you're making all the things that primitive man would have used.

But does she try and bring in some history, whether it's castles or primitive man? Does she care if history comes in at all?

She can't say to herself, "I am going to take early stone age in this term because it may not come at all." No, she can't say that. You cannot write down "I am going to do this, that and the other." But you have got to be ready with what does come along. Mind you, there's nothing to stop her from twisting it into that if she wants to. You see, you can do such a lot. You can direct indirectly. If you are ready to put something for the children to take and to get ideas from, then there's no end to what you can do.

Let's say the children start building castles. Maybe the teacher doesn't know much about castles.

Well, then she says to the children, "I'm awfully sorry, I don't know much about this. Let's go to the library and get a book, and we'll find out together."

Might she then do some intensive research on her own to see where they might go?

Well, it wouldn't hurt her, would it? You see, we find that the children are teaching us so much. I've learnt far more about space and planets than I ever dreamt that I would know. But I've learnt it from the children. I think you have to face it. They know more about modern times than I shall ever know. They know more than we know because they take everything; they accept it. This is their world. To us, it's still very new, very strange, very awe-inspiring. But the child accepts it.

Is there any specialization among your teachers? For instance, might you have one teacher who is especially interested in mathematics? Might she do more with pulling groups of children together for mathematics? Or another teacher who might be especially interested in reading? Is there any specialization like that?

No, that doesn't happen. But I have been rather fortunate--just this last term or so I've had a new member of the staff who is gifted musically. I have used her quite a lot in order that the children should have singing with an instrument accompanying. All my staff have taken their own singing in the class room. But not one of them plays an instrument until I had this person. But that

is the only way that I would specialize. You see, if you take children out of their classroom, they are having an experience that the teacher knows nothing about. And so she can't go on with it. You must have the experience with your children when they're so young. When they're older, yes. From seven, shall we say, and so on--then I think you could quite easily have your specialists. They could be called in to give the special work that the children would need. But not when they're so young. I don't think it's necessary, and I feel that an infant teacher could cope with all these demands that are made on her, apart from being able to play a musical instrument--we can't all do that. But we can do so many other things.

Let me ask one more thing about the planning. Let's think about it from the point of view of the child rather than of the teacher. How much of a commitment on the part of the child is there? Let's say the child chooses the sandbox. Is there much flitting about--doing a few minutes in the sandbox and then deciding that what somebody else is doing over there looks awfully interesting and wandering over? Or is there a real commitment to stay at the sandbox for a certain period of time?

There is a real commitment to stay there. Although the teacher must know her child. There are some children who are not ready to be committed to anything when they first come to school. Or not even perhaps only then. Supposing something happens in the home. Supposing there's a sudden rift between the parents, and father goes off. Now that child is terribly disturbed. And it may be two or three days before the head teacher hears about it.

The mother might be too upset to say. And the child comes to school and is not ready to do anything. The teacher has observed, and she suddenly sees John or Joan standing aloof and not getting on with things as the child is used to doing. That would tell her something, if she sees the child begin to flit from one thing to another.

Then we have the children who come to school who are not ready to settle to anything for long. It might be the result of the home, where they've had perhaps too much attention. Or perhaps where too much has been done for them, and they can't continue with one particular thing, and so they tend to flit from one thing to another. But the teacher again watches that, and she encourages the child to stay longer at whatever they've chosen to do. No, the child is not allowed to say, "Well, I want to play with the sand," and after two minutes drift off to do something else. The teacher would say, "You asked to play with the sand, and somebody else couldn't play with it because you wanted to. Now I want to see what you've made." When the children have used something, the teacher wants to see what the child has made with it--if it's a material that's going to show something at the end. If it's water play, what the child has discovered from the water play. If it's junk--what the child has made from it. Whatever

they do, they talk about what they've done--if they're unable to write. That is a must.

> Does that mean that when the child has finished something, before he may go and start another activity, he must go to the teacher to account to her for what he has done?

Yes. That's it. And then if it's something which needed tidying away, she'll say, "Now I've seen what you've done. Tidy it up." And the child tidies up whatever it is he's had and puts it away. They can't just leave it any more than they could in a home--so that Mother comes in and falls over the train set. If they've finished playing with the train set, Mother no doubt talks about it--any parent does. Where the train's been going, and how many passengers, and so on. But of course in school it would be taken perhaps even farther than that. The child must tidy up. And talk about what he's done, or write about what he's done.

Perhaps it would be simpler to take an example from reading. The child comes to school and paints a picture. I'll take it with painting and reading only. The child paints a picture. Maybe a child from a home where television has ruled the housefhold, and Mum and Dad have been chasing the almighty shilling., and they haven't had much time to talk to the child. So from that child you might get just the "yes," "no"--perhaps even the nod of the head. So the teacher talks to the child about what he's done and gives him the words. That is really quite basic. There's another child who has come from a home where Mother and Father have had time to talk with him, and the teacher says, "What have you painted?" And the child will begin to say what the picture is about. The teacher will supply words and, again, build up the vocabulary. She might say to that child, "Would you like me to write what you've painted?" The child might, perhaps, have painted a picture of a lady--"that's Mummy." "Would you like me to write 'Mummy'?" The child might say yes; he might say no. If the child says yes, the teacher writes Mummy beside the picture. And the child can then go over the top of the writing or copy it out underneath, according to his skill.

The next time that child might paint another picture of Mummy, or there might be a picture of "Me with Mummy." The teacher says, "Would you like me to write what you've painted": Mummy--me. Then, you see, the steps go on, farther and farther. The next time it is, "This is my Mummy. This is me." Or This is Mummy and me going shopping." We do not correct any grammatical error. We write it just as the child says it.

> That's a big controversy with us at the moment.

Don't attempt to put it grammatically correct, because the child is only going to read what he said. If he says, "Me is going to do this"--I don't often hear that--"Me is going shopping," you would write "Me is going shopping." Because the next time the child reads it, he would read, "Me is going shopping" even if you wrote "I am going shopping." So don't waste your time and his. Write what he says.

Then, the next step, after the child has been doing that for some time, we get quite a lot of "This is a house." Children love to paint houses, so you'll get that over and over again. "This is a house." "This is a boat." "This is Mummy." "This is my toy." "This is--" And it keeps coming and coming. You might put one up on the wall. You could also collect the children's work together and make up a "This is-" book. When the children have done that for a certain time, you say to the child that you know would be able to do it, "Could you write write 'This is' for me, and I'll put the rest of it?" The child has drawn perhaps a picture of his birthday cake, and he goes and writes "This is" on the side. "Can you find the word 'my' anywhere in the classroom?" Yes, because you've got the pictures all round, and you've been talking about them, you've been reading all the words that other children have asked for, and the child might be able to find 'my'. If he can't, you write it on his paper, and then you supply 'birthday cake.' That is just showing how very simply and gradually it builds up.

You'll find painting is one of the things that children really love to do. You'll have more than 2 or 3 children doing painting. Some of them do it sitting at tables, some of them on the floor, some of them standing at easels. It's a lovely way of introducing reading. But you can still do it with your sand play. "This is John's sand castle." Or "A sand castle." And the child copies that onto his paper. And he can do a picture of his sand castle. When he's found out that 2 half-pints equal or fill the pint, he could draw a picture of 2 smaller jugs. He doesn't get them, of course, correct in size--you wouldn't expect it. But he might draw a picture of the two smaller ones and the big one, and write "a half" on each and "one" on the big one. Or he might be content to write, "I played with the water." He might not write, "2 half pints equal one pint," but you're content with that because he's had his number experience from what he did. And he is getting his reading and writing experience from his creative writing afterwards. There is your reading, all coming from what the child is doing.

Coming here on the train, I went into a compartment with a family--mother, father, and two little girls--who were going on a Sunday outing. I couldn't tell much about the family, except the father was reading what we call a tabloid newpaper--not the Times or the Guardian--with sensational stories. So I assume they were not a professor's family or anything like that. The younger girl was reading a paperback edition of "Now We Are Six," and completely engrossed in it. She'd look up periodically to see where they were and then go right back to her reading. I explained to her mother that I was an American teacher and asked how old the little girl was. The mother said she'd be six next month, and had started school last December, the term after she turned five. She said she had not taught her daughter to read at home at all. She had done a lot of reading to her, but the child had not learned to read until she went to

school. So she had been in school only since December and was reading what I would consider very well. The only thing she asked her mother was k-n-o-w. "Is this 'know' or 'now'?" she said. Her mother answered, "It's 'know' like you know something. Now is without the k." And the little girl went right back to her book.

Well, there's your teacher!

A little girl who started in December and is enjoying "Now We Are Six" by herself now--is this what you'd expect or is this unusually good?

I doubt whether all children who'd been in school that long would be able to do it. Not reading a book of that standard--no. I shouldn't think so. Again, you see, it varies. We have children who come, and they're reading by the end of the first term, and writing quite fluently. But we have children, too, who are seven and who are still on an introductory reading book. I think that has nothing whatever to do with the method. The teacher can only go on painstakingly, giving the child something to encourage him and interest him no matter whether she is doing it from teacher projection or from the child's guiding the teacher. It does vary so.

Do you have any standard that you try to get all the children to by the time they leave you and go on to Junior School.

Well, yes, we so like to send every child to the Junior School able to attempt reading. I won't say that they're all fluent readers, because they're not. On this last occasion, I've had to send three children to the Junior School, and I've had a feeling that it's going to be a long time before those children are really able to read as I would like them to be able to read. But in every case they are immigrant children, and in every case they are children who haven't been with us for very long. One of them is a Greek Cypriot and the other two come from the West Indies. It doesn't necessarily follow that they're always the immigrant children.

What kinds of things do you use your staff meetings for? What kinds of discussions might you have with your staff? What kinds of planning would you do with them?

I have a staff meeting every day. We gather in the staff room after school dinner, for a cup of tea. School dinner in the middle of the day. Two-thirds of our children stay for school dinner. Some because both parents go out to work. But the majority because either the child lives a long way from the school and couldn't manage the journey, or because of the social life. I'm a great believer in that. The children sit with their teacher, little groups of nine. They talk to their teacher, and they talk to one another. I think it is something to be desired. I'd like to see all children stay to school dinner. But I would like to see something done to relieve the pressure on the teacher. Because my staff have no freedom

from the children--it sounds dreadful, but it's not as bad as it sounds--they are with their children from the time that school begins in the morning until about quarter to one. They go out into the playground with their own class too.

What time does school begin in the morning?

Nine o'clock. But the teacher's generally there ten minutes beforehand. I say to my staff, "Not more than three classes in the playground at a time--two if you possibly can." So everybody has a suggested time that they go out into the playground. They can dispense with it altogether if it's not necessary and sometimes it isn't necessary.

But if they go, all 40 children and the teacher go together?

Not always. Supposing 4 or 5 of the children are deep in a story, or they're making dresses, or there's something that they must finish--why shouldn't they stay and finish it? So they stay in the classroom and go on with it. I've got infant helpers going about. I'm generally passing through. The school secretary is passing through. There are so many people and the classroom door is open. And if children are working, you don't hear any noise. Again, that's where that film was so misleading, because it sounds noisy.

I know. We realized that was due to the technology, the kind of equipment.

Yes, in fact, the remark by many visitors is "How quiet it is." I'm very, very sorry that you won't be here in about three weeks time when we're settled. I'd love for you to have come in then. What I would like to do would be to come over to America and answer people's questions, or perhaps take a class. Let people see how it can be done. To me it's as natural as breathing. I can't think that you could even begin to teach in any other way.

After lunch, how is the staff free for a meeting over tea with you?

We'll all be free. You have to know a little bit about the way that London schools work. London, I would say, is one of the best authorities in this country. Not just because I work for it. I think London is a wonderful Authority. And there's a wonderful relationship between the schools and the people at County Hall and in the local divisional offices. They're not just names to us. We really know them. They take an interest in us, and we feel that it's a very friendly system. As regards dinners, some schools--most schools--have perhaps one teacher on duty for the first half of the dinnertime, and then another teacher takes over the second half. And that teacher stands there and sees that the children behave themselves at the table, that they're not unruly, that nothing objectionable goes on. We sit with our children and we are on dinner duty every day, which sounds dreadful but isn't. It means no more than that you sit at a table with nine children, keeping an eye on other tables where you might have a helper sitting or one of the children. You serve out the meats; the children help themselves from the dishes to their vegetables. Whatever they take they must eat, and you encourage children who don't like greens to take just a little bit "to please me." Then the children stack up the plates, put their knives and forks into a container.

We have a meal service. They are the ladies who bring the food out and put it on the table, who set the tables, who come in with their wagons and collect the dirty plates and the cutlery and take it out to be washed up. Then we are allowed one supervisor to every 30 children staying to dinner. That's in the Infant Schools--1 to every 30. These ladies are untrained. They're generally parents of children who've gone into the Junior School. Or else they are people whose families are grown up and mother just wants something to do in the middle of the day. These supervisors receive a certain salary and they have a lunch at school. That's all part of their pay. They sit at the tables with the children and serve them, if I've got sufficient helpers. But when the numbers of the children go up, and I find that I'm a bit pushed for space, then they generally supervise in the rooms. We have children dining in four classrooms and in the main hall. When Lilian was over here, we had them all in the hall and we were very much cheek by jowl. But now the children dine in four classrooms. The peace has to be heard to be believed. It's like the peace that breathed o'er Eden. You can hardly hear a sound from the children.

Then, when they've finished dining, and they've had grace at their own table, they go out to play. And the ladies who have come in to do the supervising go out with them. They look after the children until school time begins. They see to them if they have a tumble, or if they're fretful, and so on. That gives us three-quarters of an hour, everyday.

How many teachers do you have?

I've got eight full-time next term, and a "point 5"--that means one who comes in mornings only.

Does that mean eight classrooms of 40 children?

No. I have an extra teacher because we've had so many immigrant children. These children do want extra special time given to them in training them in social habits--perhaps not so much where I am as in other schools where the problem is very much greater. Again, you see, London has been generous. Where it exceeds a certain percentage, we have been allowed an extra teacher. So I have 40 children in seven classes, and an extra teacher and the .5 teacher.

And how many infant helpers?

I have two infant helpers, here all day, and four supervisors who come in at meal-time. Then there are four kitchen staff.

During these 45 minutes every day, what kinds of things might you talk about together?

One day, we were very worried--we'd had a whole series of wet dinner times. They created a real problem, because with the hall full of furniture, there was nowhere for the children to go but into the classrooms where the teacher perhaps had got it all set for the afternoon. Perhaps children had left paintings out to dry, and they might get spoilt. So we had a chat together and wondered what we could do. It

was as a result of all the talking that we decided that we would try having them in the classroom for dining, so that the children would be in smaller groups. Since then we haven't had a wet dinner time so we don't know how it would work. We thought of all the different things we could give the children to occupy them when they were with people who hadn't been trained to look after children. We thought of such things as giving them tracing paper and pencils, getting a supply of painting and crayoning books. Comics we've always had in for the children at wet dinner times. It makes it a little bit distinct from school time. Then games like tiddeldy winks. We had a good chat about it--how we could dispose of the children and how we could use the supervisors to best advantage.

Another time we might talk about some new number equipment that had come on the market. Or one of the staff--I gave them time off to visit other schools--one of the staff might come in and say, "I went to a school and I saw this going on. I thought it was a good idea. Do you think we could try it?" And we'd all talk about it. Or, again, I might be a bit concerned about the way that pencils seemed to be disappearing. I might find that a lot of the stock was going down. These are just little bits, but they all help in running the school. There might be a case where I find that people were tending to go out to play all at the same time. I'd say, "We did decide that we'd go out not more than two at the same time. Let's all have a talk about this and see what can be done. It seems obvious that something is happening that you all want to break at the particular time." It might be about the children's behavior in the cloakrooms. It could be about anything that crops up. Perhaps about a show of children's books. We might talk about it and arrange how we could get up to see it, or whether we could possibly spare one person to go and see it. The Plowden report--we read that and discussed points of it.

It's not a school--I expect Lilian told you this--it's not a school where it's my school, and the headmistress walks around as somebody quite remote. It's our school, where we talk about our children. The teacher doesn't talk about the children in "my class." She talks about our children because we know one another's. The children come and go. There might even be an occasion when a child says, "Can I go into my friend's class? Miss Jones is going to tell a story about so-and-so, and I want to hear it." Or a child might say, "My friend is making a bridge, and he wants me to go and help him. Can I go and help him?" And then at dinner time, the children are all in a state of flux. You don't always sit with the children in your own class. You sit with other teachers' children. And you really know them.

End of taped interview.